

Congressman Michaud Re-Introduces Legislation to Create Jobs and Spur Economic Development in Maine

Thursday, March 15 2007

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congressman Mike Michaud joined five bipartisan cosponsors in re-introducing the bill he originally created three years ago that would establish a Northern Border Economic Development Commission.

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud joined five bipartisan cosponsors in re-introducing the bill he originally created three years ago that would establish a Northern Border Economic Development Commission.

The commission would be charged with investing \$40 million per year in federal resources for economic development and job creation in the most economically distressed border areas of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York. The commission would create a federal-state partnership to promote development through regional planning, technical assistance, and funding of projects aimed at encouraging economic prosperity.

This bill follows the successful model of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) that was created in the mid 1960's to lift the Appalachian Region out of poverty. According to the National Association of Development Organizations, since its creation, the ARC has reduced the number of distressed counties in its region from 219 to 100, cut the poverty rate from 31% to 15%, and helped 1,400 businesses create 26,000 new jobs since 1977.

“We need to be exploring every opportunity to bring jobs and opportunity to our region,” Michaud said.

“Protecting Maine

jobs and creating new jobs remains my number one priority. Promoting economic development in Maine and throughout the struggling areas of the Northeast through this commission could be a big part of that effort.”

The bill, as in years past, has gained bipartisan support from Members of Congress in the Northern Border region. Congressmen Paul Hodes (D-NH), Michael Arcuri (D-NY), John McHugh (R-NY), Tom Allen (D-ME), and Peter Welch (D-VT) are all original cosponsors of the bill.

Compared to most of the other regions that have an existing or proposed regional commission, the Northern border region outlined in the bill has higher unemployment, a loss of population (every other region shows

population growth), and extremely similar, and low, household income. All of these measures are also far worse than the national average.

“Other regions have embraced this approach because it works,” Michaud said. “Economic development is a challenge that our region can face together. Maine, and the entire Northeast border region, cannot afford to be left behind.”

The commission created in the bill would utilize the successful ARC approach, where local development districts and other non-profits bring project ideas and priorities to the commission from the local level. This “bottom-up” approach ensures that actions reflect both local needs and regional economic development goals. It also ensures that states have a deciding voice in the investment made within their borders.

With a proposed \$40 million per year, the Northern Border Economic Development Commission could help meet a range of local needs, including funding transportation infrastructure, broadband development, alternative energy projects, agricultural development, land and forestry conservation to maintain productive traditional uses, investment in fishing infrastructure, or health care facilities, among others.

“In addition to the projects that can be funded, one of the greatest benefits I foresee is the resulting federal, state, and local partnership that will be forged over time through the ongoing planning process,” said Michaud. “This commission will bring people from all levels of government and non-profit groups together to figure out the best ways to move our region forward in cooperation. Introducing this initiative has already been a step in the right direction, as we bring people together from many different sectors to think creatively, constructively, and cooperatively about our future.”

The name of the commission was updated in this version of the bill to reflect the Commission’s focus on the area within the four participating states that abuts the Northern border.

A hearing on the Northern Border Economic Development Commission bill is expected to take place in the next couple of weeks in the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

###